

‘There are things that lurk in the library,  
that thumb and squeeze between the leaves.  
New worlds can be found in the books,  
characters listen to all that you read.’

Joseph Coelho, *There Are Things That Lurk in the Library*, 2017

From open knowledge and effective evidence to the vital value of kindness (and a man in a camper van!), the 2019 CILIPS Autumn Gathering provided delegates with the opportunity to form new connections, encounter new ideas and discover new ways to conceptualize the future direction of their profession.

The Gathering took place on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October in the elegant and spacious venue of Perth Theatre (on the outbound train journey, my colleague was amused to discover via

Twitter that at least ten other librarians were also on board – in the event of a book-based emergency, our fellow passengers were in very safe hands!). The theatrical setting proved



particularly appropriate when CILIPS President Yvonne Manning took to the stage dressed for Halloween as Humpty Dumpty (accompanied by several other nursery rhyme characters, from the Queen of Hearts to Twinkle Twinkle!) Yvonne expressed hope that her time as

President has centred on encouraging CILIPS members to experience ‘moments of courage, laughter and innovation’, and all three were very much in evidence as the Gathering continued.

Our first keynote speaker, Catherine Stihler OBE, focused her ‘Information is Power’ session on ‘How Open Knowledge and Data Inform Democracy’, describing libraries as one of the most trusted public spaces: vital knowledge centres in which digital and physical resources can interact. Calling for a future where all non-personal information is open and free, Catherine encouraged delegates to question how we can ensure that all library users have the skills and opportunities they need to access knowledge. This theme of reflection (without needing to be bound by the status quo) was also apparent in the first breakout session that I attended. From a (difficult!) choice of three, I participated in a School Libraries Group Scotland Workshop, during which small teams of delegates considered how the role of a school librarian has been - and could be - defined. As an early career professional with aspirations to work in this area, I found this session invaluable, and it also complemented my second breakout session: ‘Why Libraries and Storytelling Matters’, with children’s author A. H. Proctor. In one of two studio spaces, our debate ranged from why vast inequalities remain in library funding to how we can encourage reluctant young readers to better enjoy literature!

Lunch provided the perfect opportunity to meet the many exhibitors who attended the Gathering, including Borrow Box, BetterWorldBooks and the Scottish Library & Information Council. Their colourful stalls provided the chance to chat with varied professional partners: even when speaking to organisations that my institution



already works with, I felt as if I always learned something new!

The Gathering's first afternoon keynote speech was delivered by poet and author Joseph Coelho: providing moments of laughter as well as inspiration when he recounted his adventures as part of 'The Library Marathon' – travelling across Britain (in a well-loved



camper van) on a mission to promote libraries by joining a branch in every UK local authority! For me, Joseph's speech highlighted the importance of being prepared to articulate, express and if necessary defend the value of

libraries to many different audiences, and this theme was echoed in my next breakout session: 'Aye Write! Creating a City-wide Legacy with Glasgow's Book Festival'. Programme manager Katrina Brodin demonstrated how analytics provide an evidence-based way to determine the future shape of Scotland's only library-based book festival, as well as identifying communities who are at risk of being underserved by literary programmes. I also particularly loved the 'Making Space for Kindness' breakout, a joint session between University of Glasgow Library and North Ayrshire Libraries, which revealed how physical accessibility, thoughtful design and compassionate customer care can have a powerful impact on library users (and staff!)

The Gathering's themes of intellectual curiosity, cross-profession collaboration and being ready to demonstrate the value of our work were combined in the final keynote speech of the

day: ‘How Do You Know If You Are Making A Difference? Evidencing and Telling Your Story’ by Dr Sarah Morton. Acknowledging how challenging it can be to provide evidence of the intangible yet deeply powerful human benefits that libraries provide, Sarah encouraged delegates to think about ‘contributions’ rather than simply ‘attributions’, and even provided a starting framework within which to evaluate projects (I already have plans to deploy this structure for a piece of evidence within my Professional Registration!)

I greatly appreciate the generosity of the CILIPS Professional Development Fund in allowing me to attend the Gathering. By the conclusion of the day, I felt that Gathering’s content had been cohesive and inspiring, flowing together despite (or perhaps because of) featuring contributors from many different parts of the profession. I returned home (on another librarian-laded train!) with my strongest sense yet of a profession that is unafraid to thinking creatively when meeting its challenges, and one ready to test the boundaries of not only what library and information professionals do today, but what we can do in the future.